

**Media Literacy**  
**University Lecture**  
**Draft**

**Format:**

Lecture is divided into two parts, 30 minutes each:

1. a theoretical introduction with locally relevant cases;
2. an expert panel discussion, with journalists, fact-checkers or representatives of social media invited to participate in a discussion moderated by the lecturer.

**Part 1: Media Literacy. Theoretical framework**

The lecture introduces students to the concept of Media Literacy to understand news as a means to detect ‘information disorder’ in obvious and subliminal messages. Media Literacy enables students to be masters of information they consume and to recognise and resist when they are being manipulated in relation to *disinformation and misinformation that pose as news*.

*The instructor will present and explain varieties of information disorder and illustrate them with local case studies.*

**Aims of the lecture:**

*To be a more discerning consumer of information found online, by thinking about the broad spectrum of disinformation and misinformation.*

*To think critically about the people who create these types of information, what formats it takes, how it may be interpreted and how it spreads.*

*To understand the complexities of ‘information disorder’, particularly the need to differentiate between those who create these types of information, the formats they use and the way that audiences may share those messages.*

*To be able to consider the difficulties we have in terms of addressing the challenges of disinformation and misinformation.*

*To underline the issue of how the ‘information disorder’ affects democracies and open societies*

*To enable participants to critically analyse the news industry’s responses to the phenomenon of ‘information disorder’*

*To understand the role of social media platforms in the development of the disinformation crisis*

*To learn from emerging best practices among journalists and news organisations responding effectively to the crisis.*

**Media Literacy:**

**A. Definitions**

**“Disinformation” and “misinformation”, „malinformation”, information.**

*Usually, discussion of ‘fake news’ confuses two concepts: misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation is information that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true. Disinformation is information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinformed by malicious actors.*

**Mal-information:** *information, that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country, like true information that violates a person's privacy without public interest justification.*

**Propaganda** *is not synonymous with disinformation, although disinformation can serve the interests of propaganda. But propaganda is usually more overtly manipulative than disinformation, typically because its communication emotional rather than informational.*

**Narratives:**

*Narrative is present in news, as well as in disinformation, misinformation and mal-information. It is embedded in what facts are selected as critical in the news.*

*Students need to learn to recognise that even authentic news is always constructed and consumed within wider narrative frameworks which give meanings to facts, and which implicate broader assumptions, ideologies and identities. This means the ability to recognise the difference between diverse journalistic attempts to capture and interpret salient reality on the one hand, and on the other, instances of deception that exploit the format of news while violating professional standards of verifiability.*

**Therefore, “fact-checking” should be accompanied by “narrative unpacking” – examining the structures of meaning within which facts and non-facts are mobilised for particular purposes.**

**The lecturer will tell the students how stories are selected, who produces the content, what methods are used to create the appearance of an authentic representation of reality, how language is used, what is emphasised, what is omitted, who is saying what, how important and/or reliable that person is, what his/her agenda may be, what impact that news had/has/will have, and how others view and consume the same news.**

**False Connection**

*When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content, this is an example of false connection. That's common on social media platforms.*

**Misleading Content**

*Misleading use of information to frame issues or individuals in certain ways by cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively.*

**False Context**

*Real content is often being re-circulated out of its original context.*

**Manipulated Content**

*Original content is manipulated to deceive.*

**Fabricated Content**

*Example: fabricated ‘news sites’*

**Minimum knowledge: understanding differences between misinformation, disinformation and ‘malinformation’.**

**B. The phenomenon of the Digital Era:  
Rise of „on demand news” platforms**

*‘On-demand’ news, mobile delivery and realtime engagement on social media are further increasing pressure on news professionals facing diminishing resources in a never-ending news cycle. One of the first victims became critical reporting. The erosion of trust in journalism and mainstream media organisations causing audiences to dissipate further, diminishing remaining profits and fuelling the spread of ‘information disorder’.*

*Facts, entertainment, advertising, and fiction are increasingly blurred. And when disinformation and misinformation are published, the social news distribution system, dependent on peer-to-peer sharing, frequently sends the content viral, making it impossible to pull back, even if journalists and other factcheckers successfully debunk it.*

**C. ‘Information disorder’ and Digital transformation of the news industry**

*Depletion of newsroom resources: staff and budgets, leading to less scrutiny of sources and information, and less ‘on-the-ground’ reporting.*

*Less time and resources for ‘checks and balances’, e.g. including reporter fact-checking and sub-editing.*

*Social-first publishing is commonplace, with reporters posting their stories to their individual social media accounts and/or those of their publishers to meet audience demand for real-time news. Practices include ‘live tweeting’, ‘Facebook Live’ videos, and other journalistic acts which do not necessarily involve editorial oversight (akin to live broadcasting), potentially resulting in a ‘publish first, check later’ mindset.*

**Main issues:**

*Pursuit of virality at the expense of quality and accuracy. This is a problem likely to be exacerbated by ‘machine learning’.*

*Increased likelihood of disinformation and misinformation going viral with distribution amplified by emotional reactions*

*Sensational information is more likely to be shared*

*The inability to easily pull back or correct disinformation and misinformation once it has gone viral*

**Information disorder and governments:**

*The ability of governments and other agencies to side-step news media interrogation and verification by ‘going direct to audiences’ to avoid scrutiny. There is evidence of increased manipulation of the power of social media by those seeking to influence election outcomes and public policy.*

*Only few newspapers can afford fact-checking units within newsrooms, and as outputs of media development projects.*

*The demand to publish instantly on social platforms can lead to the inadvertent sharing of disinformation and misinformation or material from spurious sources*

*The low level of media and information literacy and verification skills within broader society. This means that in many cases, general social media users are ill-equipped to determine if content is authentic before sharing it.*

*The risk of poor quality journalism practice further downgrading audience respect for the profession and giving legitimacy to attacks on news media by those who seek to silence critics*

*The risk of audience confusion about what constitutes news, as distinct from disinformation masquerading as news.*

**The ill-preparedness of newsrooms to deal with disinformation and the need for editorial social media teams to develop updated strategies to better combat the problem**

### **The rise of social media platforms**

**The Guardian Editor-In-Chief Katherine Viner has assessed that “Facebook has become the richest and most powerful publisher in history by replacing editors with algorithms.”**

**The social platforms have been hailed as ‘the new gatekeepers’ although they remain reluctant to accept responsibility for traditional publishing oversights - including verification and curation - despite making decisions to censor some content in a manner that undermines media freedom.**

### **Young people and information / news sources**

**According to various studies, in many parts of the world young people’s engagement with mobile devices means they get most of their news through these machines via chat applications (apps), social media, and, occasionally, traditional media websites and blogs.**

**On many of these, there is little or nothing to flag what is reputable journalism and what is amateur reportage, let alone what is disinformation.**

**The instructor will highlight to participants the need to developing a healthy scepticism towards all information they consume and necessity to weigh the veracity of reports, posts, feeds, photos, videos, audio content, infographics, and statistics within appropriate contexts.**

## **D. FACT-CHECKING**

*The type of fact-checking which will be discussed happens not before something is published but after a claim becomes of public relevance. This form of “ex post” fact-checking seeks to make politicians and other public figures accountable for the truthfulness of their statements. Fact-checkers in this line of work seek primary and reputable sources that can confirm or negate claims made to the public. “Ex post” fact-checking concentrates primarily (but not exclusively) on political ads, campaign speeches and party manifestos. Early projects dedicated to this form of*

*The second wave of fact-checking projects emerged following the global surge in so-called ‘fake news’. The term, now co-opted and misused, describes entirely fabricated sensationalist stories that reach enormous audiences by using social media algorithms to their advantage.*

*This second wave often concentrated as much on fact-checking public claims as debunking these viral hoaxes. Debunking is a subset of fact-checking and requires a specific set of skills that are in common with verification (especially of user-generated content known as UGC - see Venn diagram below). This module will concentrate on fact-checking as defined below, while the next module will tackle verification of digital content and sources.*

**Examples of fact-checking organisations around the world**

**Fact-checking and its components:**

**1. Finding fact-checkable claims by scouring through media outlets and social media. This process includes determining which major public claims**

**(a) can be fact-checked**

**(b) need to be fact-checked.**

2. *Finding the facts by looking for the best available evidence regarding the claim at hand.*
3. *Correcting the record by evaluating the claim in light of the evidence, usually on a scale of truthfulness.*

**How does it work:**

*Trustworthy fact-checking organisations explain their process in public methodologies.*

*The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) has developed a code of principles that guide conscientious fact-checkers in their everyday work. Fact-checking organisations apply to become verified signatories of the IFCN code of principles. This requires an external assessment that evaluates the effective implementation of these standards.*

**Fact-checking has emerged as a distinct form of journalism with its own ethics and methodology of the practice.**

**What questions fact-checkers ask when assessing the quality of evidence?**

*How to distinguish fact-checkable claims from opinions?*

*What are cognitive biases that can get in the way of factual understanding?*

*What are different strategies for determining the authenticity of sources, photos and videos, shared via social networks.*

**Students should be aware of different types of false and misleading content often shared during breaking news events on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube carried by otherwise reliable news organisations, serving to discredit them.**

**With any verification, some general guidelines apply:**

*scepticism*

*accuracy checklist*

*Assume nothing*

*Be cautious with anonymous sources.*

*By identifying the originator of information or images, and performing a system of checks on both the source and the content they have shared, we should find ourselves in a position to verify them as the source, providing the checks give you the required outcomes.*

*Is the content original, or has it been “scraped” from previous reporting and re-appropriated misleadingly?*

*Has the content been digitally manipulated in some way?*

**Manipulated content:** content that has been digitally manipulated using photo or video editing software

**Staged content:** original content that has been created or shared with the intent of misleading

**Part 2 : expert panel discussion on the topics raised in the Part 1.**